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THE NORTH SHORE WATCH

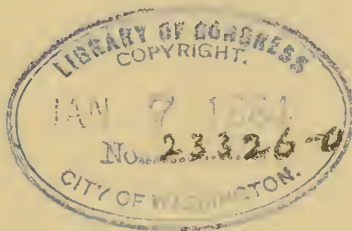


A BEACH AT BEVERLY.

THE
NORTH SHORE WATCH

A THRENODY

BY
GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY



Privately Printed

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No......

CLARENCE LAIGHTON DENNETT

SEPT. 6, 1854—JUNE 5, 1878

THE NORTH SHORE WATCH:

A Threnody.

I.

FIRST dead of all my dead that are to be,
Who at life's flush with me wast wont to roam
The pine-fringed borders of this surging sea,
From far and lonely lands Love brings me home
To this wide water's foam;
Here thou art fallen in thy joyful days,
Life quench'd within thy breast, light in thy eyes;
And darkly from thy ruin'd beauty rise
These flowerless myrtle-sprays;
The hills we trod enfold thee evermore,
The gray and sleepless sea breaks round the orphan'd
shore.

II.

All things are lovely as they were, and still
They draw with gladness toward me as a friend;
The evening star doth touch me with the thrill
Of welcome, and the waves their voices blend
To hail my exile's end;
Oft while I wander'd in those weary lands,
This dear-remember'd shore would comfort me,
Seeing in thought the everlasting sea
Washing his yellow sands;
But now the scene I long'd for gives me pain,
Since he is dead, and ne'er shall feel its joy again.

III.

Still planet, making beautiful the west,
Bright bringer of the stars and shelter'd sleep,
Easing our hearts, as some belovèd guest,
Whom for a little while our eyes may keep,
And thro' long years shall weep;
O eloquent with flashes to the soul,
Ev'n as his eyes beneath thy pure empire
Beam'd the mute music of the heart's desire,
Thee, too, doth fate control;
And brief as his thy hour of light must be—
To earth her starry hush, my solitude to me!

IV.

Yet here our dayspring long ago was born,
While heaven still hover'd near earth's dusky
frame;
Light touch'd the isles, and joyously the morn
O'erflow'd the orient with prophetic flame,
And on the waters came,
Crimson and pearl, and woke the singing shore;
On over murmuring waves the glad light swept;
On thro' the west the loosen'd glory leapt
The far blue uplands o'er;
And slowly rose the sun, and made the sea
White with his splendor, and fill'd heaven with purity.

V.

Yes, on this beach we welcomed in the world,
And loved the lore of its wise solitude,
Where on the foaming sands the surges swirl'd,
Or broad, blue-belted calm, in blessèd brood,
Lay many a shining rood;
Here in that prime we kept our boyish tryst,
When woke our April and the need to rove;
We trod the mantle that the white moon wove,
We pierced the star-loop'd mist;
And ever where our eager feet might roam,
The air was morning, and the loneliest spot was home.

VI.

The eloquent voices of the yearning sea
Call'd to us, strong as syllables of fate,
And, wafting in, like some lost memory,
Subdued us to the haunting hopes that wait
Round boyhood's rapt estate;
The deep spell moved a passion in our blood,
And made the throbbing of our hearts keep time
Unto the laughter of the waves, and chime
With thunders of the flood;
And subtly as a dream takes hue and form,
Our spirits clothed their youth in ocean's sun and
storm.

VII.

Still would we watch, wave-borne from dawn to dark,
The pools of opal gem the windless bay;
Or touch at eve the purple isles, and mark
Where, by the moon, far on the edge of day,
The shore's pale crescent lay;
Or up broad river-reaches are we gone,
Thro' sunset mirror'd in the hollow tide—
In beauty sphered, as some lone bird enskied,
The halcyon boat drifts on,
To twilight, and the stars, and deepest night,
With phosphorescent gleams, and dark oars dropping
light.

VIII.

Ah then a presence moved within this deep,
That more than beauty made its regions dear;
O'er the long levels of its golden sleep
The light that beams from the eternal year
Flash'd on the spirit clear;
And wheresoe'er we saw the ocean roll,
With sounds of harmony his waves among,
The song that breathed before the lyre was strung
Gave echo to the soul;
And tremulously the immortal instincts woke,
That prophesy of Him in whom the sweet dawn broke.

IX.

Alas, the faëry light that truth once wore !
Alas, the easy questing of the heart !
When, by the hush'd and visionary shore,
The dreaming hope, wherein all things have part,
Made our young pulses start !
Once, once I knew thy sweetness, O salt sea !
I reap'd along thy furrows bearded grain ;
Thy groves, that never drink the sun nor rain,
Gave nectarous fruit to me ;
And all thy herbless pastures yielded wine,
Deep-hearted, fragrant, bright, — ah then his hand
clasp'd mine !

X.

Yea, heart with heart companion'd we went on,
And ever lovelier was the wooded shore;
More joyous bloom'd the May, and warmer shone
The slant light down the forest's muffled floor,
With music vaulted o'er;
Ah, when the bluebird thro' the meadows darts,
Still yellow dogtooths gleam amid the brakes,
And fearlessly on all the green-leaved lakes
Lilies unfold their hearts;
Earth's children slumber when the wild winds rise —
The tempest passes o'er, and heaven looks thro' their
eyes.

XI.

But the dark pines, whose heart is like the sea's,
Mourn for one darling flower they nurtured here,
With morning fed, and deep, deep harmonies —
The sweetest blossom that the windy year
E'er rifled and left sere;
Wake, O ye violets preluding the May,
And many a barren slope for beauty win!
Burst, O white laurels, flush your cups within,
And whisper, spray to spray!
But till the cypress buds, and blooms the yew,
The sylvan years bring not the love that once ye
knew.

XII.

Too swiftly fled the green and fragrant time!

Bleak on the vacant earth the North Wind fell,
Bitter and fierce, to beat the frozen clime,

In shrivell'd fields and ruin'd woods to dwell,

And on the flood's black swell;

But us the rude transformer could not change;

We saw his pale dominions gleam afar,

His keen skies flash with many a friendlier star,

And, lo, the vision strange —

Dear to our faith — far in the alien north,

With faltering hues and faint, a dream of morn stole
forth.

XIII.

Such presages before us ever went,
And flush'd the skies with joyful heraldings;
We trusted beauty — 't is the element
Wherein the soul unfolds her poising wings,
And heavenward soars, and sings;
But in the dawn and by the star-swept tides,
In dim melodious aisles of lonely pines,
We felt the heart of sorrow none divines,
That in all things abides;
And borne on sighing winds came sounds of woe,
Whose burden well we knew, but he fear'd not to
know.

XIV.

I saw the beauty of the early world
More lovely imaged in his lucid mind;
Pure at his heart of innocence impearl'd,
Shone the white truth no search can ever find,
In love, as light, enshrined;
Him nature folded childlike to her breast,
Gave him her peace, her strength, her ease, her
joy;
Fate could not move him, doubt could not annoy,
Nor sorrow, all men's guest;
And woven of her music fell his voice
On the wide-glimmering eve, and bade my soul rejoice.

XV.

“ Ere yet we knew Love’s name,” he said to me,
“ He gave the new earth to our boyish hands;
For us morn blossoms, and the azure sea
Ruffles and smooths his long and gleaming sands
Upon a hundred strands;
In green and gold the radiant mist exhales,
When thro’ the willow buds the blue March blows,
And sowing Persia thro’ the world the rose
Reddens our western vales:
Clasp’d with the light, bathed with the glowing air,
Rest we in his embrace who made our paths so fair!

XVI.

“Why fear we? wherefore doubt? is Love not strong,
Whose starry shield o'er-roofs our mortal way,
Who makes his home within our hearts lifelong,
An instinct to divine, a law to sway,
A hero's faith to stay?
See, all life beats responsive to his might;
Its yearning in his tameless hope began;
Its dawning triumph in the heart of man
Is his far-beaconing light;
He builds the empire of the golden years,
The red strife, too, is his, the field of blood and tears.

XVII.

“Thro’ Him we look toward life with conquering
eyes,
Nor swerve, nor falter, tho’ his fire must blend
With our young hearts as flame with sacrifice,
Consuming all we are for that great end
He bids our souls befriend;
The laws invincible of his firm state
Work with us till the vision grows the fact,
And thought, slow-suppling into perfect act,
Makes our desire our fate;
Nor otherwise unto truth may man attain,
Tho’ built in Shelley’s heart, tho’ orb’d in Shakspeare’s
brain.

XVIII.

“ His are we, as we were before we saw
The murder-strife that ravin cannot sate,
The fierce, incessant moan, the strokes of law,
The deep betrayal of our birth and state
That baffles us with fate;
Be life's inevitable sadness ours,
The evil that we cannot help but will,
The good with viewless consequence in ill,
Our maim'd and thwarted powers!
Nor yet” — I hear him say — “repining know,
The shadow-clouded earth thro' the blue deep must
go.

XIX.

“It moves, and plunges to the central sun,
Its paltry ruin flashes, and is gone;
The stars, indifferent, their calm courses run,
The constellations shine as erst they shone,
The cluster'd heavens go on;
Who shall foresee of all the one blind doom
When darkness shall inhabit torpid space,
Still, starless, orphan'd of dawn's lovely face,
Unfathomable tomb! —
Yet may the soul pitch her adventure high,
With beauty and with love impassion'd, tho' to die.

XX.

“ Beauty that sings of unisons unseen,
Bright emanation of consenting laws,
In flower, wave, shell, blue skies, and pastures green,
The passing of the power that hath no pause,
That knows nor fate nor cause;
The thrill of life aye pulsing thro’ the void,
With rhythmic motions felt in sun and star,
And galaxies of splendor streaming far,
Nor in their woe destroy’d;
The presence wonderful, beneath, above, —
In the lone heart of man it wakes, incarnate Love.

XXI.

“It hallows all, the aureole He wears
Whom frail mortality hath never bound;
Who in his hands the burning sphere upbears,
Tho’ stars grow gray, their dateless ruin found,
And perish in their round;
He is—and, lo, ’t is loveliness we see,
The heavens majestic, and the joyous earth;
Is not—and all the glory and the mirth
Are things of memory;
Long, long o’er us be his divine control—
The beauty of the world, the rapture of the soul!”

XXII.

Such musings ours upon the moonlit shore,
While dark with motion sways the luminous tide;
On come the long, black waves, and, whitening o'er,
Fall, far-resounding, eddy, and divide,
And up the smooth sands glide;
So, life-engirdling, shone eternal truth,
So darkly luminous, so swift, so strong,
Flooding our mortal brink, it broke along
The winding shores of youth;
There silent, glad, in Love's repose we lay —
Calm was among the stars, peace on the heaving bay.

XXIII.

O wherefore could we not forever dwell
In that seclusion of the world new-born,
Where on our passive youth the promise fell
That dawns beneath the sweet brows of the morn,
The light none lives to scorn!
Too soon we left the haunts of boyish thought;
Moor'd was the boat beside the shining sea;
The arethusas flower'd in secrecy,
And fell, unloved, unsought;
Lone, the rare cardinal, autumn's herald, stood;
The bittersweet gleam'd red in the deserted wood.

XXIV.

One watch was ours; far o'er the ebbing sea,
Heavy and dark, the rainy shadows lay;
From his familiar door he walk'd with me
To that broad hill, grown dear in boyhood's day,
The old field-trodden way;
Chill rose the mists, and faint the distant roar
Of ocean sounded; our old seat we took
Silent and sad; cold autumn's dying look
The summer landscape wore;
We minded not—in our hearts shadows were
The wide earth harbors not, housing their misery there.

XXV.

The Hour sprang forth from universal time,
Of his joy-hearted race the last sad Hour;
Crown'd heir of all his brothers of the prime,
Bodied more nobly, girt with secret power,
Starr'd with Love's passion flower;
Thro' night he sprang, and black the flakes of gloom
Fled, afar off, the lustre of his feet;
Our hill he sought, and made the darkness sweet,
Staying the wand of doom;
And dear as from the Grail's all-precious sight,
Grace from his presence flow'd, and fell on us as light.

XXVI.

We seem'd to live within the soul alone
Of sorrow's silent love the loftier mood;
The spirit, vibrant to love's perfect tone,
Sang love that was, more subtly understood,
In love to be, renew'd;
And was death hovering there, with shades of woe,
Round that dear head the sullen frosts confine?—
Dear hands, dear lips, dear eyes, I knew thee mine,
Mine, mine, where'er I go!
The Hour was dead; we rose, we took our ways,
Forever lost to sight thro' all the exiled days.

XXVII.

O Song, move softly thro' the laurell'd lyre,
O melancholy music breathing woe;
With strains that trembling loose love's wild desire,
And waft it to its peace, thro' sorrow go,
With ocean pauses, slow;
Strike nobler notes, O laden as thou art,
That die not on the ear with dying tones;
O touch the finer chords man's nature owns
To ease the breaking heart;
And harmonies that of the soul partake,
Heard in the days of joy, in evil days awake!

XXVIII.

Heavy is exile wheresoe'er it be!

Or where his armor'd ships' strong bows divide
Green, empty hollows of the Afric sea,

Or where my broad-brow'd prairies, westering
wide,

A race of men abide;

And life in exile is a thing of fears,

A song bereaved of music, a delight

That sorrow's tooth doth feast on, day and night,

A hope dissolved in tears,

A poem in the dying spirit—aught

Lost to its use and beauty, desolate, idle, nought!

XXIX.

Heavy is exile wheresoe'er it be!

To miss the sense of love from out the days;
To wake, and work, and tire, nor ever see

Love's glowing eyes suffused with tender rays —
Darling of human praise!

To lose love's ministry from out our life,

Nor gentle labor know for dear ones wrought,
When once love lorded the throng'd ways of
thought,

And quell'd the harsh world strife;

To feel the hungering spirit slowly still'd,
While hours and months and years the barren seasons
build!

XXX.

Ever to watch, like an unfriended guest,
The sun rise up and lead the days thro' heaven,
The silent days, on to the flaming west,
The unrecorded days, to darkness given,
Unloved, unwept, unshriven:
With our great mother, Earth, to live alone;
To clasp in silence Wisdom's moveless knees;
To fix dumb eyes, that know fate's whelming seas,
On her eternal throne;
While better seems it, were the soul sunk deep
In life's death-mantled pool, seal'd in oblivious sleep!

XXXI.

“Alas,” I cried, beneath the sun-bright sky,
 “What profits it to search what Athens says —
To heap a little learning ere we die,
 Blind pilgrims, walk the world’s deserted ways,
 And lose the living days;
To cheat sad memory’s self with storied woes;
 To summon up sweet visions out of books
 Wherein old poets have enshrined love’s looks;
 To seek in pain repose;
O cup of bitterness he too must taste,
Shut in his homeless ship upon the salt sea-waste!”

XXXII.

What tho' o'er him the tropic sunset bloom
With hyacinthine hues and sanguine dyes,
And down the central deep's profoundest gloom
Soft blossoms, fallen from the wreathèd skies,
The seas imparadise?
With light immingling, colors, dipt in May,
Thro' multitudinous changes still endure—
Orange and unimagined emeralds pure
Drift thro' the soften'd day;
“Alas,” he whispers, “and art thou not nigh? —
Earth reaches now her height of beauty ere I die.”

XXXIII.

And I give answer, — “Would that he were here!

Three halos, crescent-horn'd, of purest grain,
In shadowless keen ether burning clear,

In morn's blue eastern depths, a glory, reign,

Burn brighter, burn, and wane;

Never to us,” I whisper, “by that strand

Stept morn, so diadem'd, upon the sea;

Sweet wanderer, joyous shall thy roaming be

Across this wind-swept land!

Urge on thy western flight and die in bliss!

On those unshelter'd waves his temples didst thou
kiss.”

XXXIV.

Brief now his voyaging is o'er those far seas,
By shoal and reef that the lost mariner mock,
By lands of palms that nurse the poison'd breeze,
And pillar'd isles whose foam-girt bases rock
With the tornado's shock;
The branding suns smite down on glassy waves;
They sink; on high strange stars malignant roll,
The regents of the pale, untravell'd pole,
Whose coasts no mortal braves:
Why will he on? — Come back, O bleeding heart!
O stricken soul, return! Death hunteth where thou art.

XXXV.

Eager as sea-birds from their bonds set free,
He sought the ancient harbors of his home;
The Southern Cross fell in the frozen sea,
And stars of gladness, wash'd in northern foam,
His boyhood heavens upclomb;
Once more beneath the tender spring he drinks
The fountains of his youth for which he yearn'd;
The beauty of the shore, like love return'd,
Deep in his spirit sinks;
The violets linger, wide the laurels bloom —
Alas, the flowering earth is his eternal tomb!

XXXVI.

Moan, melancholy Ocean, he is dead
In whom thou hadst thy life, thy throbbing joy!
Our woe, O melancholy Ocean, shed
In music round thy ever-stranger'd boy,
Whom the blind deeps destroy!
Waken, dark pines! that ruinous eclipse
Hath broke the tender league of musing youth,
And shut love's insights and the hopes of truth
Within his parted lips:
I take, ay me, no welcome from his hands —
He comes not thro' the wood, nor down the shadowy
sands.

XXXVII.

From him the lone sun doth withhold his light;
To him lorn eve her western star denies;
But O, a lovelier world hath sunk in night,
Its music-breathing fields, its dreaming skies,
Dark in his darken'd eyes;
The rapturous element is still, in him,
And all of nature that can perish, dead;
Oblivion gathers o'er his obscure head;
Death binds him, face and limb;
Earth-sunder'd soul, no beauty now he knows,
Nor sense nor act of love sweetens his long repose.

XXXVIII.

On crag and beach I hear his threnody;
I touch the myrtles clinging round his grave;
But weak is all that severs him from me,
Faint and far off, altho' my heart will crave
The old response he gave;
No, not the moaning waves nor sighing pines
Persuade my soul of loss, nor blinding tears —
I love him, I shall love thro' lonely years,
Where'er my life declines;
I lean my head down to the flowerless sod, —
I feel his shepherding as when on earth he trod.

XXXIX.

Mortality sways not, while heaven shall last,
The starry years that were when he was mine;
Death blots not out a fair-recorded past,
Whose meanings deeper are than men divine,
Who write it, line by line;
The years of noble life are pledges deep,
That bind futurity our souls to friend;
Woe cannot cancel them, nor far time end
The privilege they keep;
They live — their light still blessèd where it leads,
Their hoarded music loosed, pure song, in perfect deeds.

XL.

Yea, he to whom Love was as god, is dead;
Cold, mute, and dark, he unresponsive lies;
A joyless form, the kindling presence fled,
The spirit faded from his wistful eyes;
No more will he arise!
Yet not in vain was our adoring trust,
Our deep-vow'd fealty, our service done;
To finer issues love that was, lives on,
Nor moulders into dust:
Of Love, the Giver, still my song must be,
The Victor, Love, repeat, whose grace descends on me.

XLI.

Love blends with mine the spirit I deplore,
Like music in sweet verse that lasts for aye;
While yet we wander'd by our native shore,
He sent the blessings for which all men pray,
That cannot pass away;
He wrought with ministries of star and flower
And the gray sea, to build our lives secure;
He made the sources of the spirit pure,
And with truth lent us power;
And him to me He gave — and lo, his gift
Is changeless, and doth now my soul from death uplift.

XLII.

On deepest night arisen, the morning star
Trembles across the wide, unquiet sea,
And heavenward springs, with influence felt afar,—
The world's new hope he leads, the day to be,
The life that waits for me;
Speed on, glad star, and golden be thy flight,
Inviolable, serene, the waters o'er!
Fear not the eclipsing west, O born to soar,
And, dying, die in light!
Bring, bring the morning with her tides of song,
Her floods of amber air, breaking earth's heights along.

XLIII.

Beauty abides, nor suffers mortal change,
Eternal refuge of the orphan'd mind;
Where'er, a lonely wanderer, I range,
The tender flowers shall my woes unbind,
The grass to me be kind;
And lovely shapes innumerable shall throng
On sea and prairie, soft as children's eyes,
Morn shall awake me with her glad surprise,
The stars shall hear my song,
And heaven shall I see, whate'er my road,
Steadfast, eternal, light's impregnable abode.

XLIV.

Love, too, abides, and smiles at savage death,
And swifter speeds his might and shall endure;
The secret flame, the unimagined breath,
That lives in all things beautiful and pure,
Invincibly secure;
In Him creation hath its glorious birth,
Subsists, rejoices, moves prophetic on,
Till that dark goal of all things shall be won
Men yearn for thro' the earth;
Voices that pass we are of Him, the Song,
Whose harmonies the winds, the stars, the seas, prolong.

XLV.

Break, surging sea, about the lovely shore!

O dimly heaving plains, thro' darkness sweep!

Thy restless waves, with morning stars roofed o'er,

Their incommunicable secret keep,

Impenetrable deep!

The eldest years on time's oblivious verge

Saw thee thro' tempest-weltering night uplift

Great, mountainous continents amid thy drift,

And their tall peaks submerge;

The vast, abysmal, wandering fields moved on,

Whelming the wasteful wreck of the old world undone.

XLVI.

And still round mortal shores thy billows roll,
And shall thro' long, long ages yet unborn;
Lone splendor of the sense-illumined soul,
Eternal moaning of the spirit lorn,
By strokes of loss outworn;
Thy terrors image our blind mortal state,
Dark with impending doom and whirling woe,
And monsters in thy bosom come and go,
And death is thy fell mate;
Ah yet, thro' sun and storm, gray ocean, roll,
Love clasps thy mighty tides in his profound control.

XLVII.

Surge on, thy melancholy is not doom!

Surge, O wan sea, into the golden day!

The morn is breathing off thy purple gloom,

The isles lift up their promise, dim and gray,

Love holds his dauntless sway!

Thy ripples kiss the shore with lips of foam,

Thy waves are dawning soft — the winds blow free!

Keep thou the eternal watch, O dear, dear sea,

Those far lands I must roam!

Lo, 'tis the sunrise — and the sphered stars move,
Singing unseen, like silent thoughts thro' silent love.

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